

Public Health Committee Public Hearing, March 28, 2022

Testimony in favor of HB-5397, *An Act Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis* and SB-477, *An Act Concerning the Public Health of Residents of the State*.

Senator Abrams, Senator Anwar, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang, Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Jonathan Perloe. I am director of communications for CT Against Gun Violence.

Last year, following the gun murder in Harford of three-year old Randell Jones while sitting in a car with his mother and siblings, Senator Moore forcefully and passionately called on the state to finally get serious about addressing the crisis of community gun violence that hit a 25-year high last year. These killings disproportionately victimize Black and brown communities, especially young Black men who account for about 45 percent of gun homicides.

We are indebted to Sen. Moore for focusing the legislature and governor's attention on the public health crisis of gun violence, an issue for which CT Against Gun Violence has advocated a solution since 2020, when we launched the CT Initiative to Prevent Community Gun Violence, which now includes more than 50 state and national [partners](#).

As a result of Sen. Moore's leadership, it is very encouraging that bills have been put forward in this committee and others that include provisions to address the crisis of community gun violence in Connecticut: SB-477, HB-5397 and SB-16. All have elements worthy of your consideration.

CT Against Gun Violence would like to see Senator Moore's bill, SB-477, move forward including language that is part of HB-5397.

We believe the bill should include five key components:

1. Declaring that gun violence in Connecticut is a public health crisis to bring it the attention it demands.
2. Dedicated staffing to secure and disburse state and federally-funded grants, provide technical assistance, support research and ensure accountability.
3. A grant-making process and criteria that lead to evidence-informed, competitive funding of community-based violence reduction programs.
4. An ongoing Advisory Council with voices of those most impacted by community gun violence, and other stakeholders, to ensure accountability.
5. A commitment to ongoing state and federal funding commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis, starting with an allocation of \$5 million from the General Fund for fiscal year 2023.

States and larger cities around the country have established similar offices of violence prevention, with dedicated staff to administer grants to community-based organizations, coordinate violence prevention activities, support policy development, and conduct research and assessments. Some offices go farther by providing direct violence prevention services, such as violence interrupters.

According to data provided in November, 2020 by the Office of Legislative Research, the per capita annual spending on violence prevention programs in the seven states that have state-level offices of violence prevention or dedicated program funding (NY, CA, IL, MD, PA, NJ, MA) ranges from \$300 per thousand residents to \$3,600 per thousand residents. It averages \$1,250 per thousand residents. Comparable annual spending for Connecticut based on the average per capita funding of other states would be about \$4.5 million.

Based on a similar analysis we did of the 19 jurisdictions, mostly cities, that are in the National Offices of Violence Prevention [Network](#), spending in Connecticut comparable to the per capita annual spending of those programs would be about \$4.3 million. The National OVP Network is run under the auspices of the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform.

Both approaches yield funding of a magnitude similar to the \$5 million of General Fund spending called for in HB-5397.

It's also relevant to note that according to the National OVP Network, the full-time equivalent staffing for their offices averages 12, from a low of one in Washington State to a high of 35 in Washington, D.C.

We're at a turning point, where there is broad consensus that more needs to be spent on anti-violence programs to complement our strong gun laws and law enforcement efforts.

Connecticut simply can't address this public health crisis without a commitment to hire professionals who have the time and expertise to craft an appropriate public health response, and who can secure funding, establish grant-making criteria, provide technical assistance, measure results and ensure accountability.

With the potential for significant funding from the federal government, it's important the State has the capacity to secure its fair share. This shouldn't be an ad hoc, short-term endeavor; it requires dedicated staff.

The case for action is strong. Around the nation, and here, programs have [proven](#) track records of reducing interpersonal gun violence using prevention, intervention and after-care approaches.

Connecticut has the resources to provide funding beyond the Governor's proposal. The latest [projection](#) for the state's budget surplus is nearly \$1.8 billion.

Although saving lives is reason enough to invest in anti-violence programs, it's also a fiscally prudent strategy.

According to [Everytown](#) and [Giffords Law Center](#), it's estimated that gun violence (of all kinds) costs Connecticut taxpayers between \$60 and \$90 million annually. A different study [estimated](#) that the law enforcement and healthcare costs of a single gun homicide are \$488,000, and that each non-fatal shooting costs \$71,000. These costs are largely borne by taxpayers. By that estimate, last year's 118 gun homicides alone cost Connecticut taxpayers more than \$50 million.

States across the country are investing in the organization infrastructure to fund, implement and support violence prevention programs, so should Connecticut.

Thank you for considering my testimony, and your work to make all communities in Connecticut safe from gun violence.

Jonathan Perloe
Director of Communications
CT Against Gun Violence
www.cagv.org

Appendix

States that have established intentional efforts to address community violence.

In November 2021, Illinois Gov. Pritzker [signed an executive order](#) declaring gun violence a public health crisis and committed \$250 million to “directly reduce and interrupt violence in our neighborhoods.” The order further funds the Reimagine Public Safety plan, a data-driven and community-based violence prevention strategy, and creates a new Office of Firearm Violence Prevention, which will give technical assistance, training and policy recommendations to Illinois communities with the highest rates of gun violence.

In June 2021, Colorado Gov. Polis signed a [bill](#) creating an Office of Gun Violence Prevention, tasked with gun violence prevention education, establishing a grant program to fund community-based prevention programs and coordinating data collection and research. The Office is housed in the Dept of Public Health and Environment, with an executive director and at least two full-time staff. Its first year appropriation is \$3 million.

In 2019 the California Violence Intervention and Prevention ([CalVIP](#)) Grant Program was established by the legislature to appropriate \$30 million to cities and community-based organizations with the purpose of reducing homicide, shootings and aggravated assault through evidence-based initiatives.

In Massachusetts, the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative ([SSYI](#)) is a standing program to fund ongoing efforts that focus on reducing violence among high-risk youth. Funding has ranged from \$4.5 million to \$11.4 million since it began in 2012. Cities where SSYI funded programs operate have seen a reduction of more than 5 violent crime victims per 100,000 residents, representing nearly 1,000 victimizations prevented over a three-year period from 2011-2013.

New Jersey [signed into law](#) a Violence Intervention Program in 2020, and has since [awarded](#) \$20 million in multi-year grant funding to nine hospital-based violence intervention programs.

Also in 2020, Virginia General Assembly [established](#) the Virginia Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Fund to make grants to support evidence-informed gun violence intervention and prevention efforts. Gov. Northam proposed and the legislature [approved](#) \$2.6 million in funding for the 2021-22 biennial budget.

In 2018 the Maryland legislature established the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program ([VIPP](#)) with \$4 million of seed money. In consultation with the VIPP Advisory Board, the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention administers the program to provide competitive grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations to fund evidence-based health programs or evidence-informed health programs.

Here is a [roundup](#) of federal, state and municipal news regarding creation and funding of the capacity to support community violence intervention programs.